

Marine Corps Martial Arts: One Mind, Any weapon

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Major CB Lynn, CG 15
20 February 2009

Report Documentation Page				Form Approved OMB No. 0704-0188	
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1. REPORT DATE 20 FEB 2009		2. REPORT TYPE		3. DATES COVERED 00-00-2009 to 00-00-2009	
4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE Marine Corps Martial Arts: One Mind, Any weapon				5a. CONTRACT NUMBER	
				5b. GRANT NUMBER	
				5c. PROGRAM ELEMENT NUMBER	
6. AUTHOR(S)				5d. PROJECT NUMBER	
				5e. TASK NUMBER	
				5f. WORK UNIT NUMBER	
7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) United States Marine Corps, Command and Staff College, Marine Corps Combat Development, Marine Corps University, 2076 Main St., Quantico, VA, 22134				8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER	
9. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)				10. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S ACRONYM(S)	
				11. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S REPORT NUMBER(S)	
12. DISTRIBUTION/AVAILABILITY STATEMENT Approved for public release; distribution unlimited					
13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES					
14. ABSTRACT See Report					
15. SUBJECT TERMS					
16. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF:			17. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT Same as Report (SAR)	18. NUMBER OF PAGES 10	19a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE PERSON
a. REPORT unclassified	b. ABSTRACT unclassified	c. THIS PAGE unclassified			



What is the purpose of the Marine Corps Martial Arts Program (MCMAP)? What should its purpose be? Is this particular program usable in actual situations or is it fundamentally flawed? Despite years of implementation, the program still raises doubt regarding its necessity, usability and validity. From Okinawa to Camp Lejeune, Marines practice MCMAP techniques on plots of grass -- steadily acquiring tan, gray and green belts.

Yet doubt still pervades the force. Is it really necessary, and does it actually work?

Three simple but effective ideas will assist commanders in employing the MCMAP program. First, leaders must **recognize the benefits of MCMAP**. Second, leaders must **counter-balance the limitations of the MCMAP instructors** with their own war fighting education and experience. Third, leaders must **encourage instructors to train to a specific end**. These three ideas, coupled with clear guidance from the commander, will sky-rocket the close-in fighting skills of the Marines in any given unit.

Fundamentally, these three ideas arise from an existent paradigm regarding the nature of war and the focus of a commander. The commander employs his unit in combat to accomplish the mission. In doing so, he does not limit himself to only one or two tools. Rather, he seeks to use all tools available to place his enemy in a dilemma. Anything that can be used to assist in accomplishing his mission is a tool. Hence, the value of a tool in the eyes of a commander is based on its capacity to assist in accomplishing the commander's mission.

It is understandable that MCMAP can a too, but it is not the only tool How does one adjudicate between the value of one tool against another, and what places MCMAP at a higher level than call for fire or close quarters battle? What is the basis of prioritization?

As previously stated, the value of a tool lies in its capacity to assist the commander in accomplishing the mission. This value is stated in terms of capabilities and limitations, and priority is assigned according to the tool's relative value compared to other tools. The first step, then, is to determine the nature of the tool (capabilities and limitations).

Leaders must recognize the benefits of MCMAP

The effective implementation of MCMAP results in at least six fundamental benefits -- one primary benefit (physical ability) and five lesser capabilities (mindset, confidence, self protection, physical violence and compliance with the Commandant's guidance). The list is by no means exhaustive but is complete enough to be useful in discussing the value of MCMAP.

First, MCMAP provides a *primary capability* to engage enemies and non-compliant civilians with both lethal and non-lethal techniques along the entire force continuum in support of the mission and according to the Rules of Engagement (ROE)/Rules for the Use of Force (RUF).

Second, MCMAP teaches the combined arms dilemma mindset through use of the "One Mind, Any Weapon" idea¹, developing the following thought process: *You may come at me with a knife, but I will fight you with my rifle, stick, knife, hands, feet, knees, the walls, any obstacles, my canteen, helmet, or the carabineer that I wear on my flak jacket...* It is "one mind; any weapon."

Third, MCMAP also develops confidence in non-kinetic ability. Personnel who lack confidence in their non-kinetic abilities (controlling the force of an engagement, talking down a belligerent, restraining/detaining an individual) are more apt to escalate to a kinetic solution. Developing the confidence to deal with situations throughout the spectrum of violence enables Marines to relax more in situations that require close-in contact with civilians. The strategic implications are astounding.

Fourth, MCMAP teaches dominance of a situation. Self-defense denies the enemy the ability to have an effect on oneself (move, block); self-protection focuses on dominating a situation to achieve the desired outcome (offensive). A Marine who finds himself on the ground wrestling with an enemy should have one thing in mind – "Get up, finish this, get my weapon and continue the mission."

Fifth, MCMAP addresses psychological preparation necessary to take a life by your own hands with bayonet, knife, canteen or boot heel.

Lastly, MCMAP complies with the Commandant's guidance regarding implementation Marine Corps-wide.

Leaders must counter-balance the limitations of MCMAP instructors

The second factor in determining the value of a tool is the limitation of the particular tool. The limitations of MCMAP center mostly on green belt instructors as they are the most prevalent instructors in the fleet. These instructors attend instructor school for three weeks and have less than four years of total war fighting (or martial) experience – mostly as followers. The commander, even at company level, has almost a decade of war fighting study and experience as well as training from the best schools on war fighting. The commander should leverage his experience to mitigate the limitations of the instructors. Four primary limitations exist.

Green belt instructors are taught to instruct rather than teach. The green belt instructor school focuses on one thing – accurate transmission of information. The school teaches the Marines the precise moves for the first three belts of MCMAP and how to train other individuals to mimic these movements (EDIP – Explain, demonstrate, imitate, practice).² Instructors will need instruction to develop their teaching abilities further.

In addition, instructors teach techniques in isolation rather than integrated with other techniques into a combined attack to defeat an opponent. Commanders should teach the combined arms dilemma to instructors and assist them in integrating tan, gray and green techniques. This integration should create a barrage of attacks similar to the combined arms attack of machine guns, mortars, artillery and tanks. Once a baseline is established, the instructors can develop their own combinations.

The third limitation is that instructors are taught drills rather than scenario. The modern battlefield; however, requires actions throughout the entire force continuum, not merely those required for bull-in-the ring, pugil sticks and knife grappling. The commander should encourage scenario development by the instructors in support of field exercises that will test the specific skill sets expected to be needed per the mission requirements.

Lastly, instructors are focused on belt instruction rather than end state. Instructors are taught how to train individuals to attain rank rather than how to develop individuals who can fight at close range. The commander must specify the result required.

Limitations only become risks when one does not recognize the limitation but operates as if it does not exist. When a limitation is known and properly staffed, it is no longer limiting.

But isn't the purpose of having black belt instructors partially to develop these aspects of training and to make the training usable to the Marines?

Black belt instruction addresses many of the aspects that green belt instructor training does not. However, most units will not have a black belt instructor; even if they do, they will not make MCMAP the instructor's primary duty. The burden of most training falls on the shoulders of the green belt instructors.

Leaders must encourage instructor to train to a specific end

The philosophy of MCMAP is the philosophy of war fighting. Every method a commander uses to accomplish his mission is “martial” in application and “art” in implementation. Feet, hands, stick, knife and bayonet are merely different tools to be used at different distances than pistol, rifle, mortars, artillery and air. However, a few points are helpful to develop skill. The chart below lists recommendations per the aforementioned benefits of MCMAP.

CAPABILITY	FOCUS	TRAINING METHOD
PHYSICAL ABILITY	TECHNIQUES	REPETITION; PAIRED TECHNIQUE
MINDSET	ADRENAL STATE	SCENARIOS INVOLVING THE UNKNOWN; FEW RULES
CONFIDENCE	ENTIRE FORCE CONTINUUM	SCENARIOS THROUGHOUT FORCE CONT
SELF-PROTECTION	DOMINANCE	MULTIPLE OPPONENTS; DISADVANTAGE
PHYSICAL VIOLENCE	RUTHLESSNESS	IMPACT ON INANIMATE OBJECTS (STABBING GOATS)
COMPLIANCE W/ ORDER	STATISTICS	BELT TRAINING

Physical Ability

The focus is on developing technique proficiency. *The training method* is to conduct endless repetitions of a barrage of linked techniques leading to a determined end. Ten or twenty repetitions are not enough. The following *example* ought to be done one hundred times in a row: Left eye gouge – Right knife hand to clavicle folding to a Right horizontal elbow to the head – Right reverse knife hand to opponent’s opposite temple – wrap the neck – knee to face – takedown – vertical stomp to back of the skull. Imagine this rather than a single vertical hammer fist, twenty times.

Mindset

The focus is acquiring the adrenal state. *The training method* is to place Marines into uncertain scenarios after having physically pre-exhausting them with other stresses (hike, run, sleep deprivation). *Examples* include ambush runs in which Marines will be attacked at an unknown time and location during a trail run and must defend themselves as well as limited visibility scenarios. Frequently change the terms of combat.

Confidence

The focus is developing ability throughout the force continuum. *The training method* is to conduct blindfolded scenarios addressing the entire continuum. An *example* is to brief a blindfolded Marine the setting and current ROE/RUF. Once the blindfold is removed, the other assailants begin their assault, and he acts in accordance with the scenario.

Self-protection

The focus is dominating a situation. *The training method* is to force Marines to fight from a position of disadvantage, demanding dominance according to the ROE before the scenario ends.

Examples include making them fight unarmed against multiple armed opponents, fight to get up against an enemy standing above him, or fight back to a weapon system, in which his rifle is placed twenty feet from Marine and the bad guys are between him and weapon. Digressive fight training is also useful for teaching how to end a fight. For example, every thirty seconds the scenario will deteriorate to the enemy's favor.

Physical violence

Focus is developing ruthlessness. *The training method* is to allow Marines to impact inanimate objects. *Examples* include striking MCMAP pads, striking an opponent in a Red Man suit (from the MPs) and stabbing a goat carcass with a knife.

Compliance with Commandant's guidance

The focus is complying with the order. *The training method* is to practice techniques to achieve next belt rank. Any green belt instructor can do this.

By active involvement in the process, the commander can use his war fighting experience and education to bring about his desired end. Two scenarios illustrate this point. In the first scenario, the commander tells the instructor to teach the green belt counter to the round punch. As a result, the Marines will know the technique and will be able to reproduce it but may or may not be able to use it against a stick attack to the front. In the second scenario, the commander tells the instructor to ensure the Marines are able to defend (unarmed) against a stick attack to their front. The result here is different. The commander has just opened the door to exploration. This task awakens the instructor and will awaken the Marines. The counter then becomes any of the following: counter to the round punch, move-block-strike, arm bar takedown, move-block-strike to reverse wrist wrap or block and bulldog. Suddenly, the options are endless. Suddenly, the Marines are creatively involved in the process. Suddenly, the Marines are actually able to use this knowledge in real application.

But this is only the first step. The training continues. The commander should also require the instructor to develop a scenario that tests the ability of an individual to use this technique. The instructor sets up the scenario so that one unarmed individual will walk down a dark alley in a MOUT town or between a row on CONEX boxes. At some point during his walk, he will be engaged by multiple opponents with sticks. The Marine executing the scenario achieves the adrenal state, feeling many of the physiological and psychological aspects of an actual situation.

Conclusion

By understanding MCMAP's capabilities and limitations, the commander develops the ability to wield this tool in a combined arms fight. By using an appropriate methodology, he ensures his instructors are able to develop the Marines so the Marines are able to employ their close-in fighting skills when necessary. By recognizing the benefits of MCMAP, counterbalancing the limitations of the MCMAP instructors and encouraging instructors to train to a specific end, a commander will ensure the effective implementation of MCMAP; his company truly has "one mind, any weapon."

Captain Grayson is an infantry officer. He is a Green Belt Instructor in USMC Martial Arts as well as an instructor in both Lung Ch'uan Fa (Dragonfist) Kung Fu and FIERCE Instructor training (force protection seminar training).

Notes

1. MCMAP Student Outlines, 2007.
2. MCMAP Student Outlines, 2007.

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